

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 14, 2006

The Honorable R. David Paulison
Under Secretary for Federal Emergency Management
Department of Homeland Security
500 C Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Director Paulison:

We are writing on behalf of the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority (NORTA) and the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, which recently learned that FEMA has rejected extending their mission assignments for both LA Swift bus service between Baton Rouge and New Orleans and Emergency Public Transportation Services. We are grateful for the prior commitment of public transportation to benefit the victims of Hurricane Katrina; however, we respectfully request that FEMA reconsider its decision to deny extending the current mission assignments due to the remaining significant need for public transportation service in the affected area.

It is our understanding that The Stafford Act provides authority to the President for emergency public transportation through 42 USC 5186 which states:

“The President is authorized to provide temporary public transportation service in an area affected by a major disaster to meet emergency needs and to provide transportation to governmental offices, supply centers, stores, post offices, schools, major employment centers, and such other places as may be necessary in order to enable the community to resume its normal pattern of life as soon as possible.”

It would be grossly inaccurate to categorize New Orleans and the surrounding area as having returned to a “normal pattern of life,” a fact which is illuminated by recent census data. The Census Bureau’s “Special Population Estimates for Impacted Counties in the Gulf Coast Area” indicates that New Orleans holds roughly one-third of its Pre-Katrina population, while East Baton Rouge Parish, and Harris County, Texas, have both experienced significant population growth since Hurricane Katrina.

Additionally, the usage rates of both the LA Swift and the Emergency Public Transportation Services provide further evidence that the FEMA missions are necessary, successful and should be continued. We have been informed that, LA Swift has carried over 210,000 passengers and the Emergency Public Transportation Service has carried over 160,000 passengers in August of 2006 alone. Furthermore, the service provided to the evacuee communities in East Baton Rouge Parish through the Emergency Public Transportation Service mission is essential to helping these hurricane victims recover and rebuild.

FEMA indicated in its October 26, 2006, letter that the "stable situation in Louisiana forecloses" options for continuation of these essential transportation missions. This assessment of stability appears to be in conflict with both the usage rates of the transportation services and the population data of the affected areas. However, in order to achieve a "stable situation" further transportation access must be maintained, a task that will be exceedingly difficult without FEMA's resources.

As the City of New Orleans and the surrounding metropolitan area rebuilds and redevelops economically, the public transit services provided through the FEMA funded missions are essential to the continued progress of the entire region. We respectfully suggest that FEMA extend its public transportation mission assignments, consistent with the President's commitments and the Stafford Act.

Sincerely,



Mary Landrieu
United States Senator



David Vitter
United States Senator



Richard H. Baker
United States Representative



Jim McCrery
United States Representative



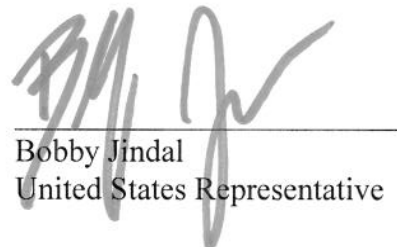
William Jefferson
United States Representative



Rodney Alexander
United States Representative



Charles W. Boustany
United States Representative



Bobby Jindal
United States Representative



Charlie Melancon
United States Representative